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Annual eye exams essential to Veterans' vision and eye health

Joint study with VA shows promising results in preventing age-related blindness

WASHINGTON — August is National Eye-Exam Month and the Department of Veterans Affairs encourages all Veterans and their family members to schedule their annual appointments.

VA is highlighting routine eye exams particularly among senior Veterans.

Age-related macular degeneration is the leading cause of vision loss in adults over the age of 60 — a common condition which can blur the sharp, central vision people need for activities like reading and driving.

A collaborative [study](#) involving VA researchers discovered a group of HIV medications known as nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors may help prevent AMD.

The study was led by the University of Virginia School of Medicine and included more than 15 medical centers and universities in the U.S. and abroad, including the South Carolina [Columbia VA Health Care System](#) with support from its affiliated nonprofit [Dorn Research Institute](#).

Investigators looked at data of more than 33 million patients over a 20-year period and discovered patients receiving HIV medications — namely as preventive measures against HIV — were roughly 40% less likely to develop dry macular degeneration, the most common form of AMD.

“The database results back genetic findings from the study that explain how the HIV drugs might help protect vision,” said VA Investigator Scott Sutton, Pharm.D. “The results are intriguing and offer promise for a new approach to preventing and treating a disease that affects millions of Veterans and non-Veterans.”

According to the [VA Office of Blind Rehabilitation Services](#), more than 1 million Veterans have low vision, and roughly 130,000 are legally blind. As the Veteran population continues to age, vision impairments such as macular degeneration will increase in prevalence. Exercise and maintaining blood pressure have been found to be effective in preventing vision loss.

Though hopeful, researchers say further studies and Food and Drug Administration approval will be needed before HIV medications identified in the study can be used to help treat age-related blindness.

Routine eye exams and preventive vision testing are covered under VA health care benefits. [Click here](#) to find the closest VAMC to schedule an eye appointment.

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